DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 538 HE 033 373

TITLE	Managing the Transition Experience: A Bridge between the First and Senior Years.
INSTITUTION	Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Collegiate Employment Research Inst.
PUB DATE	1995-11-00
NOTE	25p.; Paper presented at the National Conference, Students in Transition: Critical Mileposts in the College Journey (Dallas, TX, November 9-11, 1995). Publication list prepared by Philip D. Gardner. Some sections are not formatted well.
AVAILABLE FROM	Collegiate Employment Research Institute, 113 Student Services Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. 517-355-2211; E-mail: robinsob@msu.edu; For full text: http://www.csp.msu.edu/ceri/pubs/publica3.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Accountability; Cognitive Style; College Students; Education Work Relationship; Grade Point Average; Higher Education; Interpersonal Competence; Interpersonal Relationship; Personality Traits; Problem Solving; Socioeconomic Status; *Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes linkages between the first year and the senior year of college, looking at the results of a workplace readiness assessment. The study was based on the assumption that the campus environment does not prepare students to handle life beyond college. Students volunteers completed a lengthy paper survey prior to viewing a video assessment. This instrument tapped into key developmental characteristics, including learning style, course patterns, involvement in academic and non-academic activities, and interactions with faculty and peers. It also included the NEO personality assessment, which measured five personality traits. Socioeconomic and academic performance measures (grade point average) were also obtained. The study used the Wilson Learning's Success Skills 2000: Benchmarks for High Performance video assessment, which had students view four new college employees in workplace situations, then make decisions at certain points. Major scales and subscales included: applied problem solving, interpersonal effectiveness, and accountability. The overall scores and three subscale scores are provided. Statistical tests revealed no relationship between grade point average, ACT/SAT scores, gender, family income, or parent's education level and assessment scores. The only significant result was for minority status. (SM)

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Managing the Transition Experience: A Bridge Between the First and Senior Years

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Workshop presented at the national conference, Students in Transition: Critical Mileposts in the College Journey. Dallas, TX, November 9-11, 1995 All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another.

Anatole France

College is often viewed as a series of discrete transitions: high school to first year, sophomore to junior, transfer in, declaration of a major, and senior to work. While there may well be some anxiety associated with each transition, they are often discussed in very brusque and definite terms. Hopson's emotional model of personal change illustrates a more prolonged series of stages associated with transition. An individual will pass through all stages; some spending more time than others at each step. This model still focuses on discrete transitions. But what happens if we view college as a transition of the whole.

Bridges' model offers an opportunity to do that. He postulates each transition has an ending, neutral period, and beginning. His model contains as much emotion as Hopson's but it is integrated into a larger whole. So for the next hour, let's assume that the college experience is the neutral zone between the ending of an individual's managed education and the beginning of self-directed learning in work and life. In the neutral zone, the old is blended with the new; then slowly fades as new processes take over.

The process of blending allows students to understand and prepare for their new life beyond the campus. Unfortunately, the campus environment does not prepare students well to handle the new. In fact, some institutions refuse to allow the new enter. The inability of students to practice their future leads to adjustment problems (unemployment, lack of focus, etc.) after graduation.

Presently, the freshmen experience and senior year experience stand as discrete activities that serve as doorkeepers to the next beginning. This position does not operate well in Bridges' model. Rather, a continuous series of activities must be provided that allow students to blend their past and their future.

Through the use of a workplace readiness assessment, this presentation will propose linkages between the first year and the senior year. Results from a large assessment will be presented. Discussion will center on initial efforts to support the college transition experience.

The interval between the decay of the old and the formation and the establishment of the new, constitutes a period of transition which must always necessarily be one of uncertainty, confusion, error, and wild and fierce fanaticism.

John C. Calhoun

Senator

METHODS

Subjects either volunteered in response to advertisements in the college paper and direct mail announcements or were enrolled in selected courses that included the assessment as a class requirement. Efforts have been made to obtain a representative sample by class level and academic program. Currently 2027 students have completed all phases and another 200 have taken the assessment but failed to complete other elements of the project.

During the current semester specific groups of students have been contacted to insure the proper mix of academic programs. It is anticipated that an additional 500 students will complete the assessment. To provide a representative benchmark from a cross section of educational programs, information will also be collected from these groups: high school seniors, community college (2 year) students who will enter workplace upon graduation, students from select liberal arts colleges, and advanced degree candidates in selected masters programs.

Another key component of this study is its longitudinal design. Selected groups will be reassessed in 1996 and early 1997. Some will view the video instrument while others will receive a paper-pencil exercise.

To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.

Henri Bergson

French Philosopher

INSTRUMENT

Participants completed a lengthy paper survey prior to viewing the video assessment. This instrument tapped into some key developmental characteristics including learning style, course patterns, involvement in academic and non-academic activities, and interactions with faculty and peers. Also included was the NEO personality assessment which measures the big five personality traits. Socio-economic and academic performance measures (GPA) were also obtained. Only the socio-economic and academic performance information will be used in this presentation.

To assess workplace readiness, the Wilson Learning's Success Skills 2000: Benchmarks for High Performance was selected because it:

1. Focused on non-content or academic competencies: applied problem solving,

interpersonal communication, and accountability.

2. Offered contextual situations through video simulations rather than paper- pencil

exercise.

3. Could be developed into an instructional module in various formats.

Success Skills 2000 is a criterion referenced, performance based instrument (Wilson Learning, 1990 and 1992). It is administered in a 75 minute session where student view four new college employees in workplace situations and are asked to make decisions at certain points. The scoring depends on the weighting of a number of cues contained in 33 scenarios. The instrument appears to have high face validity and reliability. The national norms have been established by a group of new employees nominated by benchmark companies based on their performance at work (top 10%). Thus, the expectations for performance are very high.

MAJOR SCALES AND SUBSCALES

1. Applied Problem Solving

a. Critical thinking

b. Problem solving

2. Interpersonal Effectiveness

a. Influencing others

b. Building rapport

c. Teamwork

3. Accountability

a. Initiative

b. Self-Management

It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear ... it's like between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to.

Marilyn Ferguson

American Futurist

RESULTS

The overall score and the three subscale scores are provided in the next table. Before discussing them, several relationships were examined to determine if they influenced scores. The literature on early workplace success and competencies fails to find a connection with GPA or other academic performance. Statistical tests revealed no relationship between GPA, ACT/SAT, gender, family income, or parent's education level and assessment scores. The only significant result was for minority. These results are not presented as tests are being run to determine if test bias exist.

The following results captured trends by grade level (significant) and selected academic programs. In the interpretation section, competencies that comprise each scale are examined in detail.

Scores on Workplace Readiness Assessment for Undergraduates (mean)

All Participant First Yea

Sophomor

Junio

Senio Total Scor 25.8 24.3 25.3 28.7 30.9 Applied Problem Solvin

43.2

41.0

42.6

44.4

43.3 Interpersonal Effectivenes

32.3

28.5

28.3

31.2

36.1 Accountabilit 31.5 28.1 29.4 31.5 33.54

Every exit is an entry somewhere else

Tom Stoppard

American Dramatist

Chaos often breeds life, while order breeds habit.

Henry Adams

American Historian

INTERPRETATION

A. Applied Problem Solving

1. Learning Styles

Schroeder, C.C. "New Students - New Learning Styles." Change, Sept./Oct.

1993, 21-26

2. Learning Process

Magolda, M.B. Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns

in Students' Intellectual Development. San Francisco: CA, Jossey-Bass, 1992.

3. Research

Gardner, P.G. and Kozlowski, S.W.J. "Learning the Ropes! Co-ops Do It

Faster. Journal of Cooperative Education. 1992

Skil First Year (mean Sophomore (mean Junior (mean Senior (mean Applied Critical Thinking

Gathering Information

Evaluating Information

Understanding Relationship

3.07 2.45 3.5

3.04 2.65 3.7

3.28 2.42 3.9

3.22 2.47 3.9 Problem Solving

Choosing Strategies

Considering Alternative

3.23 2.3

3.18 2.2

3.32 2.3

3.30 2.29

B. Interpersonal Communication

1. Tracey, W.R. Critical Skills. New York: AMACOM, 1988.

2. Tannen, Deborah. Talking From 9 to 5. New York: W. Morrow, 1994.

3. Hetherington, C. Celebrating Diversity. Duluth: Whole Person Associates, 1995.

4. Robertson, A. Listen for Success. Burr Ridge, IL: Irwin Professional Pub., 1994.

Skil First Year (mean Sophomore (mean Junior (mean Senior (mean Influencing Others

Communicate for Agreement

Persuading

Justifyin

3.84 3.04 3.6

3.77 3.25 3.8

3.97 2.99 3.7

4.05 3.24 3.6 Building Rapport

Sensitive

Relate Positively to Other

3.20 2.8

3.33 2.8

3.57 3.1

3.70 3.2 Teamwork

Helping Others

Asking for Help

Contributin

2.49 3.49 2.7

2.68 3.44 2.6

2.74 3.37 2.8

2.85 3.43 2.96

C. Accountability

1. Schultz, W. The Human Element. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

2. VanBlerkom, D. Orientation to College Learning. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995.

3. Levit, S. Quality is Just the Beginning. New York: McGraw Hill, 1994.

Skil First Year (mean Sophomore (mean Junior (mean Senior (mean Initiative

Handle risk & unfamiliar task

Work with no guidance

Voluntarily performing task

3.38 3.51 3.5

3.50 3.56 3.4

3.57 3.37 3.5

3.57 3.29 3.5 Self-Management

Insure quality

Adapt/flexible

Manage tim

2.34 2.42 2.0

2.46 2.40 1.9

2.53 2.49 2.0

2.61 2.67 2.13

WORK SKILLS ASSESSMENT

COLLEG TOTA TOTAL - PRO TOTAL - COM TOTAL - C Al 25.8 43.2 32.3 31.5 Agricultur 28.4 38.8 34.5 35.3 Arts & Letter 31.7 44.4 35.9 33.8 Busines 30.3 46.4 33.8 30.2 Communicatio 26.5 40.9 28.8 34.0 Engineerin 27.2 39.8 35.4 29.7 Human Ecolog 25.2 45.7 25.1 29.8 James Madiso 31.5 42.5 33.2 39.6 Lyman Brigg 45.8 65.1 38.6 35.0 Natural Scienc 27.4 40.4 33.7 32.4 Social Scienc 28.5 42.7 31.3 31.36

The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything. Because a new experience displaces so many old experiences ... the world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience.

D.H. Lawrence

MANAGING THE TRANSITION

A. Freshmen Experience Module

1. Learning style inventory

2. Portfolio

3. Critical thinking assessment

B. Sophomore Experience Module

1. Workforce readiness module

2. Initiate practice

3. Portfolio

C. Junior (late) - Senior (early) Experience Module

This experience is not designed as an academic capstone course which focuses on integrating disciplinary constructs. Rather this module introduces and prepares students to terminate the neutral phase of their transition into the workplace and realize a new beginning.

1. Workforce readiness - reassessment

2. Socialization - preparation for work

3. Lifeskills management

4. Letting go!

D. Post-Graduation Follow-Up: Alumni Connection

A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.

Antoine de Saint - Exupery

CONCLUSION

If we can accept, for the moment, that the college experience is the neutral zone bridging the ending of one's managed educational development and the beginning of one's self-directed learning steps, we can craft a new mission to assist students through this time. Bridges' diagram of the transition shows that the neutral zone is not distinct rather it blends the ending and the beginning. Educational practices from the ending continue, though they become less managed (more contextual) along the journey. New beginnings blend is as students gain experience outside the classroom. Since the process of education and the workplace are different, this blending will generate chaos, frustration and anxiety. A seamless (an overused word these days) transition is possible with practice; but no path can avoid the letting go of the old (to mourn) and accepting the new (fear).

If we step outside our own boxes, a view of the landscape can offer stimulation -- there are many different ways to deal with transition! Most we haven't thought of yet.

FINAL VOICES

Omnia und tempore agenda

(Everything had to be done at once).

Julius Caesar

Shallow men speak of the past; wise men of the present; and fools of the future.

Marquise du Deffand

French Epigrammatist

Many are stubborn in pursuit of the path they have chosen, few in pursuit of the goal.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Life never presents us with anything which may not be looked upon as a fresh starting

point, no less than as a termination.

Andre Gide

Life is a series of collisions with the future; it is not a sum of what we have been but

what we yearn to be.

Jose Ortega y Gasset

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Hopson, S. "Seven Phase Model." Counseling Psychology. Vol. 9, No. 2

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